A Nichirenite Scroll for Great Bodhisattva Myōken

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The purpose of this paper is to introduce a hanging scroll depicting a mandala typical of the Buddhism promoted by Nichiren 日蓮 (1222-82) that includes an iconographic depiction of the divinity Myōken 妙見. This divinity personifies the North Star and in time became a popular secondary reference point for many followers of Nichiren's teaching. It is however most unusual for an iconic image to be included in a mandala composed in Nichiren's style and that is why it is worthy of special consideration. In the sequel, two further, related examples, but without images, are considered for the sake of additional context. Here, first, is an illustration of the figure of Myōken on the main scroll in question.

Figure1: Image of Myōken at bottom centre of mandala scroll (full illustration below).

Nichiren himself is well-known for having promulgated a very dramatic style of mandala based on written characters only, rather than pictures. The centrepiece of his mandala was inevitably the title of the Lotus Sutra which, for him, was the climax and decisive focus of all Buddhist teaching. In this he followed the tradition of Tendai Buddhism, but with a new clarity of focus and tenacity of purpose. At the same time, he drew a variety of buddhas and bodhisattvas into his integrative mandala by writing their names in dynamic calligraphic form, and he even included some Shinto divinities. The whole point of a mandala is, after all, to group together symbolically important images or symbols within a graphic frame.[1] Although considerably more than 100 mandalas created by Nichiren himself are extant, there are also others which were penned by leading followers (and indeed by lay devotees), and the story of the development of such mandalas has also been complicated by various sectarian divisions.[2] The mandala which we are discussing here is set recognisably in the tradition of the largest Nichirenite group, the Nichiren-shū, which has its headquarters on Mount Minobu, just west of Mount Fuji, where Nichiren himself had his final home. The initiative which led to the incorporation of Myōken into a Nichirenite mandala is therefore not a further sectarian development as such, but rather a variation within the main tradition.

It appears that prayers to Myōken were given a major and widespread boost after he was incorporated into the Nichirenite system. Since then, many a Nichiren-shū temple has set up a sub-shrine in its grounds where believers can address their prayers to Myōken, especially with a view to improving their fortunes in this world. He will also be found lodged at other religious sites, including some Shinto shrines. A good example of the latter is Chichibu Shrine in Saitama Prefecture, where he is an ancillary divinity, not ensconced in the main hall of worship. However, Myōken is not found everywhere. In the grounds of the large Shingon temple Tōji in Kyoto, for example, he is nowhere to be seen, even though there is room there for a complete set of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune.

Since Myōken is a personification of the North Star, which is used for maritime navigation or terrestrial orientation, he is regarded as being divinely responsible for providing directions in our personal course of life. Nichirenite Buddhism in any case sets considerable store by astrological analysis of personal destiny. In East Asia this includes not only calendrical elements, but also directional ones. Who more important then, to assist us, than the North Star in person?

A major place for devotion to Myōken is a temple at the top of a mountain suitably named Myōkenzan (though some say Myōken-san[3]). This is one of many mountains in Japan that bear the same name, but the Myōkenzan in question rears up some 660 metres above sea level at a location to the northwest of Osaka. My attention was drawn to it by the staff of the temple Honmanji 本満寺 on Teramachi Street in Kyoto. This temple also has a large

[1] In Japan the term (*mandara* in Japanese) is not always used strictly in this way.
[2] Care should be taken when consulting the internet on these matters because pages such as Wikipedia can easily be taken over by a sectarian interest group, so that the information suffers from lack of balance.
[3] This should not be confused with the expression Myōken-san which can also refer in informal speech to the divinity himself, i.e. as "Mr Myōken". Myōkenzan appears as one word because the first consonant in *-san* is only hardened when fully integrated with the preceding name.

sub-hall devoted to Myōken, named Myōken-gū, i.e. “Myōken’s Palace” and marked by a substantial stone *torii*, as for a Shinto shrine. This hall, or shrine, is further designated as one of 12 shrines to Myōken in the Rakuyō area of Kyoto based on “the 12 branches” (*jūnishi* 十二支). Myōken is identified here with the ox, the zodiacal animal assigned to the twelfth month and a position 30 degrees east of north. At the main temple, Honmanji, there are several Nichirenite mandalas, at least one of which bears the same signature as that seen in the mandala under study here. There is however no mandala which includes a graphic depiction of Myōken, and it was therefore suggested that I should pay a visit to Myōkenzan near Osaka in order to obtain precise information about the scroll and its mandala.

Accordingly, on March 15th 2019, I set out from Kyoto. The 15th of each month is the *ennichi* or affinity day of Myōken, and I therefore expected a surge of other visitors. Although the weather was fine this turned out not to be the case however, for the simple reason that the cable car bringing people to the summit was still closed for the winter. It was due to reopen on Saturday the 16th. There was therefore nothing for it but to climb the mountain on foot, which took a good three hours from the railway station below, mostly up a narrow, stony mountain path, marked only by small signposts with little pictures of helicopters and a telephone number to ring in case of emergency.

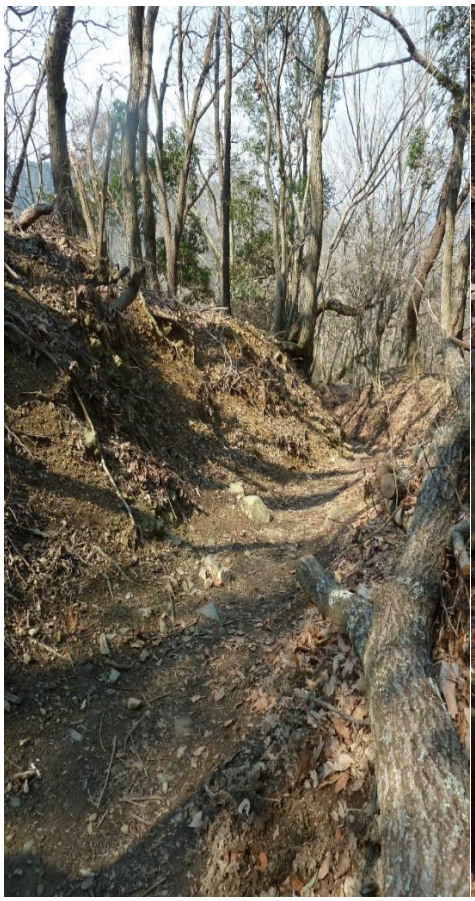

Figure 2 (left). The narrow path to the temple of the North Star. (Photo, the writer)

Figure 3 (right). A way marker showing that the path leads onward to the Palace of Myōken (Myōkengū). The last two characters are visible here. (Photo, the writer)

Nevertheless, all went well, and in recognition of my efforts the temple priests took care to answer my questions in the kindest possible way. Like many others in Japan this mountain had long been a religious site. The temple history reports that it was first opened as a spiritual site (*reijō* 霊場) at or near 750 C.E. by the monk Gyōki 行基 (668-749) of Tōdaiji fame, himself designated by his devotees as a bodhisattva (Gyōki Bosatsu). At a later date, the head of the then province of Nose (pronounced Nosé) adopted Myōken as the tutelary deity of the clan, at first under the Daoist-derived name Chintaku Reifujin 鎮宅霊符神. In the year 1600, the 23rd lord of Nose "took refuge"[4] in the faith of the Lotus Sutra under the guidance of Nichiken Shōnin 日乾上人 (1560-1635)[5], who was at that time the superior at Minobu-san. The temple that he founded at Nose Myōkenzan is called Shinnyoji 真如寺, and the hall where Myōken is worshipped is called the Kaiundō 開運堂, which means "the hall for the opening of one's fortune."

The preceding cult of Myōken seems to have first arisen in Japan as an element imported from the astrological teachings of Chinese Daoism. It should be remembered that Daoism never became a significantly institutionalised religion in Japan, though "the way of yin and yang" (J. Onmyōdō 陰陽道, in which the *on-* can also be read as *in*, i.e. *yin*) had much incidental influence. In mediaeval times the divinity was embedded in the complex iconographical patterns furthered by esoteric Buddhism.[6] Consequent upon his call to the Nose region, Nichiken rededicated the divinity of the North Star as a protector of the Lotus Sutra under the designation Myōken Daibosatsu (Great Bodhisattva Myōken). It is this same Nichiken who created the mandala which incorporates the figure of Myōken in the key position just below the title of the Lotus Sutra itself. By declaring the personification of the North Star to be a great bodhisattva, Nichiken assimilated this divinity into the complex worldview of Nichirenite Buddhism. In creating his own variation of the traditional mandala of Nichiren, it might seem that he did this in order to promote the veneration of Myōken. Indeed, he did promote the veneration of Myōken, which flourishes to this day in the context of the temples of Nichiren-shū. But this must certainly be understood as a *hōben* 方便, a "skilful means" or "expedient means", because the mandala obviously also promotes faith in the Lotus Sutra which is central to it.

The original of this new mandala can no longer be identified and is probably lost for ever. Its purpose was apparently to serve for the creation of a woodblock from which "print-offs" (*atozuri* 後刷) were then made. The block itself is also no longer in existence, as far as is known. After all, wood stored here and there, especially in wooden buildings, is easily attacked by small living creatures. The prints however may be regarded as authentic duplicates of the original. These run-off copies were distributed to devotees during the Edo Period, no doubt in exchange for a substantial donation. By the time the Edo Period came to an end in 1868, this practice had also come to an end, but it is uncertain precisely

[4] As in "I go the Buddha for refuge."

[5] It was customary for leading monks regarded as being in one of the lines of tradition deriving from Nichiren to adopt a name which incorporates the element *nichi*, meaning sun. This Nichiken is not be confused with others who had taken the same-sounding religious name written with a different final character, notably Awaji Nichiken 淡路日賢 (1243–1338), an important direct disciple of Nichiren himself.

[6] This prehistory has been set out with profuse illustrations by Bernard Faure in Chapter 2 of *Gods of Medieval Japan Vol. 1: The Fluid Pantheon* ; Honolulu (Univ. of Hawaii Press) 2016.

when. The temple itself at the top of the mountain does not even own a single copy because, as I was told, they were all given away. What this means is that the printings themselves were not regarded as being quite so valuable as an original handwritten mandala. But the original itself, having been made for the very purpose of delivering mandalas in scroll form to the faithful, was also not regarded as of crucial importance any more, once the printing block had been made. We must remember that Nichiren himself personally drew, or wrote, hundreds of copies of his own mandala, of which more than 100 are still known to be extant today. Indeed, there is one at Nose Myōkenzan. The "printed" Myōken mandala that we are describing here must also have existed in many copies, especially in Osaka and the surrounding area, but we have no idea how many. There is no doubt that since the middle of the 19th century many will have been destroyed in various fires and earthquakes, not to mention modern carpet bombing. The present example was picked up in an outdoor market in Kyoto for a low price. It was apparently regarded as being of little value because it does not have a painting on it! There may therefore be more, also being disregarded somewhere. On the other hand, I have not yet seen another myself.

This all means that the mandala under discussion, as a print-off from the block, dates from the Edo period. The head priest at the top of the mountain, Niinori Shindō Shōnin 新實信導上人, immediately affirmed this for his own part, without any prompting. Both the mandala and the scroll mounting are in excellent condition. Indeed, the backcloth is in such a good state that it is conceivable that it was renewed at a much later date. Mountings of this style have been in use right up to the present day. On the other hand, although the centrepiece itself is also in fine condition, there are no material reasons to suspect that this at least does not date from the Edo Period.

We come now to a consideration of the design of the mandala itself. It was mentioned above that the distinctive feature of the mandala tradition initiated by Nichiren is that they are *moji mandara* 文字曼荼羅, that is, mandalas showing written characters rather than iconographic images. Nichiren's own mandalas were a model for his followers who created similar ones with small but sometimes significant variations. A very personal example drawn up by a much later devotee will be introduced later. Here it is relevant to note that, dating from 1883, it illustrates the long-term strength of the calligraphy-only tradition in the Nichirenite school (cf. Figure 6).

Nichiren's design of a mandala based on characters only was not an altogether unique initiative, because from approximately the same period True Pure Land Buddhists were also designing hanging scrolls which only showed calligraphically written characters, notably expressing the call to Amida Buddha, the *nenbutsu*. On the other hand, those by Nichiren and his followers have more of the character of a mandala because they present several key reference points of their understanding of Buddhism in a geometrically integrated form. They are also used as a direct focus for devotional worship and prayer, if not precisely meditation, whereas those in the Amida tradition serve the functions of presentation and recall. The Nichirenite mandalas do serve these functions as well, and the central presentation of the name of the Lotus Sutra is fascinatingly parallel to the presentation of the name of Amida Buddha. In Japanese pure land Buddhism however, especially in its Shin Buddhist variety, prayers for this-worldly benefits are formally

rejected, whereas in Nichirenite Buddhism they are positively encouraged. Indeed, it is widely believed that the mandala itself, as the basic object of reverence (*gohonzon* 御本尊), has the power to bestow such benefits. It may be recalled that these mandalas, as *gohonzon*, replace the buddhas and bodhisattvas whose images serve in other temples as the central object of worship.

With the reservations made above we may accept that it is indeed a fundamental feature of the mandalas by Nichiren, and of those in his tradition, that they consist of written characters, mainly Chinese characters but usually with an incidental admixture of the Indian characters known as the *siddhaṃ* script which at one time was used for writing Sanskrit. By contrast with this, it is a special feature of the mandala currently under study that it contains a line *drawing*, namely of the divinity Myōken seated on a rock and holding his sword horizontally above his head. It is notable that earlier images of Myōken in other contexts show him holding his sword vertically (if any). The current image was introduced distinctively by Nichiken when he launched the cult based on Nose Myōkenzan for his followers. This innovation leads to a small but noteworthy difference in the mandala. Below the dominant title of the Lotus Sutra, the space was usually preserved for the signature of Nichiren himself, or whoever was the originator of a later version. In this case it is the iconograph of Myōken which is placed here at the bottom of the scroll beneath the title of the Lotus Sutra. As a result, the signature of Nichiken is positioned not centrally, but perhaps more modestly, to the bottom left. In other respects the scroll mainly follows the pattern of the mandala first promulgated by Nichiren, although some details remain to be noted.

In order to explain the details of the mandala, of which the calligraphy is written vertically, we will proceed as follows. First the key elements presented in bold ink will be explained, as these are very easy to find. Then, using these as reference points, the further details will follow the sequence of elements which can be identified in groups from right to left. We will first explain the general layout, and the individual items are then listed and briefly explained one by one. It must be understood that Sanskrit equivalents, given where relevant, may be known to university trained temple priests in so far as they can recall them, but that they play no part in their religious consciousness and are unknown to lay devotees. General Japanese guides to Buddhist iconography usually fail to mention them,[7] and if they appear in publications such as exhibition catalogues, they have no real function beyond providing some international decoration.

There are eight elements in very bold ink and strong calligraphy. These include the title of the Lotus Sutra in the centre, and the names of the four heavenly Kings in the two top corners and the two lower corners (items 1-5 below). These are the four heavenly Kings generally presented as being guardians of the Buddha-Dharma, and whose statues are sometimes positioned around a central object of worship. The once ancient but since rebuilt temple Shitennōji in Osaka is named after them.

[7] See for example Ishii Ayako`s *Butsuzō no mikata handobukku* 仏像の見方ハンドブック Tokyo (Ikeda Shoten) 1998. It is notable that Myōken does not appear in this otherwise quite detailed and extremely convenient pocket handbook. This is because he falls slightly outside the categories treated, even though he has been retrospectively designated as a bodhisattva.

Figure 4: The Myōken mandala by Nichiken (the scroll mounting is not shown in full). Dimensions of central panel: height 47cm, width 33cm. Writer's collection.

Between the four kings, in the left and right margins, are two elongated and relatively simple *siddhaṃ* characters which represent two "bright kings" (*myōō*), Fudō and Aizen (6 and 7). Below the heavenly King in the bottom left quarter is the calligraphically convoluted signature of Nichiken (8). As to the lighter calligraphy in the mandala, three horizontal strata may be discerned. These show the names of certain Buddhas and

bodhisattvas, of various heavenly beings and certain important monks, together with a few other indications. They are numbered 9-28 below. At bottom centre is the iconographic depiction of Myōken. The position of Nichiken's signature can also be ascertained as being just to the left of the rock on which Myōken is seated. In detail, these items are as follows.

1. Centre. Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō 南無妙法蓮華經 (Hail to the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Dharma). This salutation or exclamation is also recited verbally, and repeatedly, and is therefore in effect a mantra. It is referred to in Japanese as the shudai 主題 or the *daimoku* 題目, and is understood to sum up in concentrated form the final teaching of the Buddha as expressed in the Lotus Sutra.
2. Upper right. Dai Jikoku Tennō 大持国天王 . Great Heavenly King Jikoku. Jikoku means "protector of the land." He reigns in the Eastern Quarter.
3. Lower right. Dai Zōchō Tennō 大増長天王: (Great heavenly King Zōchō). Zōchō means "increasing and growing" and he is thus responsible for development and production. He reigns in the Southern Quarter.
4. Upper left. Dai Bishamon Tennō 大毘沙門天王: (Great heavenly King Bishamon). The name Bishamon is derived by transliteration from Sanskrit Vaiśravaṇa, the characters having no direct meaning in themselves. Bishamon reigns in the Northern Quarter. Though regarded as a mighty guardian, he was later incorporated, contrastingly, into the popular group of divinities known as the Seven Gods of Good Fortune (the *shichifukujin*).
5. Lower left (but above the signature). Dai Kōmoku Tennō 大廣目天王: (Great Heavenly King Kōmoku). Kōmoku means "wide of eyes" or in other words having a broad purview. Guardian King of the Western Quarter.
6. Middle of right-hand column of strong calligraphy. The *siddhaṃ* sign for Fudō 不動 (i.e. Fudō Myōō). Fudō means "immovable" and corresponds to Sanskrit Ācala. Myōō 明王 means "bright king." Fudō Myōō is regarded as being immovable in the face of the flames of passion.
7. Middle of left-hand column of strong calligraphy. The *siddhaṃ* sign for Aizen 愛染 (i.e. Aizen Myōō). Aizen corresponds to the Indian Rāgarāja and is regarded as a "bright king" for love, intended to lead into wisdom. The character depicting him is just a little more complicated than the one for Fudō, whom he complements in this mandala.
8. Extreme lower left corner (below Dai Kōmoku Tennō). The signature of Nichiken Shōnin. The simpler part at the top reads as Nichi- and the rest of it is the character for -ken, with some additional flourishes.

We now continue with the more delicate calligraphy. Immediately to the right and to the left of the title of the Lotus Sutra we see the names of the two Buddhas who appeared in the celestial stupa in the vision described in chapter 11 of the scripture, namely Prabhūtaratna (a long extinct Buddha) and Śākyamuni (Gautama) Buddha. These have pride of place next to the title itself. They are accompanied by four bodhisattvas referred to in chapter XXII (Chinese version)[8] whose task is to protect

[8] The chapter numeration diverges, and as a convention chapters in the Chinese version in common use are indicated with Roman numerals.

and to propagate the teaching of the sutra. A certain hierarchy is intended, and this is hinted at by the slightly varying starting points in the calligraphy of the names. Nevertheless, the list of all these items will here proceed simply from right to left, so that they may be easily identified. As explained already it must be remembered that Sanskrit equivalents are only given here for wider orientation. The Japanese devotees of Myōken are quite unaware of them and indeed might have difficulty in making sense of quite a lot of some of the Chinese-derived calligraphy.

9. Upper stratum, first line of smaller characters (starting from the right). Namu Muhengyō Bosatsu 南無無辺行菩薩. Meaning: Hail Bodhisattva of Boundless Practice. (Namu means "hail" throughout.)
10. Upper stratum, second line of characters. Namu Jōgyō Bosatsu 南無上行菩薩. Meaning: Hail Bodhisattva of Superior Practice.
11. Upper stratum, third line of characters. Namu Tahōtō Nyorai 南無多宝塔如来 (Sanskrit: Prabhūtaratna). This *tathāgata* (referring to any Buddha who has already accomplished nirvana) appeared miraculously in a celestial stupa of many jewels (*tahōtō*), according to the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, and invited Śākyamuni to sit beside him.
12. Upper stratum, fourth line of characters (i.e. re-starting at the left of the central
13. Upper stratum, fifth line of characters. Namu Jōgyō Bosatsu 南無浄行菩薩. Meaning: Hail Bodhisattva of Pure Practice. Note that this name is written with different characters from those used in number 10.
14. Upper stratum, sixth line of characters. Namu Anryūgyō Bosatsu 南無安立行菩薩. Meaning: Hail Bodhisattva of Settled Practice. The names of these bodhisattvas who appear in the Lotus Sutra are translations used in the Chinese version.
15. Middle stratum, first line of characters (i.e. starting to the left of Fudō). Daibadatta 提婆達多. (Sanskrit form: Devadatta).
16. Middle stratum, second line of characters. Ashura-ō 阿修羅王. King of the Asuras.
17. Middle stratum, third line of characters. Daibonshakutennō 大梵釋天王. This is apparently a combined reference to the Indian heavenly kings Brahma and Śakra.
18. Middle stratum, fourth line of characters. Namu Sharihotsu Sonja 南無舎利弗尊者. Meaning: Hail revered Sharihotsu. (Sanskrit form: Śāriputra).
19. Middle stratum, fifth line of characters (i.e. re-starting at the left of the central title). Namu Kashō Sonja 南無迦葉尊者. (Sanskrit form: Kaśyapa).
20. Middle stratum, sixth line of characters. Dai Nichigatsu Tennō 大日月天王. Great King of the Sun and Moon.
21. Middle stratum, seventh line of characters. Dairyūō 大龍王. Great King of the Dragons.
22. Middle stratum, eighth line of characters. Note that this line of characters descends rather lower than the preceding ones. Myōken Daibosatsu 妙見大菩薩. Great Bodhisattva Myōken.
23. Lower stratum, first line of characters starting from the right just outside the bold calligraphy. This gives the date when the mandala was originally composed. *Kan'ei sannen rokugatsu mikka*. The third of the sixth month of the third year of Kan'ei 寛永 (1626). The reference to the third year is glossed with its designation in the 60-year cycle, namely *hinoe-tora* 丙寅.

24. Lower stratum, second and third lines of characters, just to the left of the bold calligraphy. The last two characters are tucked in at the bottom left of the third line, sitting on a thin flourish from the fourth line. *Butsumetsudogo nisen nihyaku sanjū yonen no aida ichienbudai no uchi misou no daimandara nari.* 仏滅度後二千二百三十余年之間一閻浮提之内未曽有大漫荼羅也 Meaning: "This great mandala has never before appeared in the world during the more than 2230 years since the Buddha's nirvana." This standard phrase is adopted from the basic andala of Nichiren himself and does not specifically refer to Nichiken's version. Since the number of elapsed years is not changed it implies that such a mandala is always one with *the* mandala proclaimed by Nichiren.
25. Lower stratum, fourth line of characters, beginning very slightly higher than the preceding ones. Namu Tendai Dengyō Daishi 南無天台伝教大師. This is the honorific name of Saichō 最澄 (767-822) who established Tendai Buddhism in Japan.
26. Lower stratum, fifth line of characters. Note that this and the next appear centrally, just above the head of the drawing of Myōken. Kishibojin 鬼子母神. Sometimes pronounced as Kishimojin. A goddess derived from the Indian Hārītī and incorporated into Buddhism as a protector of the Lotus Sutra.
27. Lower stratum, sixth line of characters, immediately adjacent to the preceding. Jūrasetsunyo 十羅刹女. An Indian group of ten female divinities (Sanskrit *rākṣasi*), originally demonic, brought into service to assist in the protection of the Lotus Sutra..
28. Lower stratum, seventh and eighth lines of characters, immediately to the right of a strong calligraphic flourish. Namu Nichiren Taishi Nichirō Nichiin Nichijō Nichiden Nisshū tō shōnin 南無日蓮大士日朗日印日静日傳日秀等聖人. Nichiren himself is designated as a great learned master. The list of his successors is concluded with tō 等 (also read as *nado*) meaning "and so on," and they are referred to collectively as *shōnin* 聖人(saintly person). This expression is a little more elevated than *shōnin* 上人.

As will be evident, this mandala follows the basic pattern of Nichiren-style mandalas. There are however some interesting variations. Depending on the provenance of any Nichirenite mandala a differing series of *shōnin* may be named. In the mandala shown in figure 6, for example, only Nichiren, Nichirō and Nichijō appear, although all three are referred to there as bodhisattvas.

It is probably quite significant that two major Shinto divinities are *not* included in the Myōken mandala, namely Amaterasu and Hachiman. In other mandalas, including the one derived from Nichiren himself, these two are included at the bottom of the overall frame, under the names Hachiman Daibosatsu and Tenshō Daijin (the same characters may otherwise be read as Amaterasu Ōmikami). Instead we here have Myōken, imported into the Buddhist framework. The lack of Hachiman and even more so of Amaterasu may be the reason why this mandala lost traction towards the end of the Edo Period, when Shinto was beginning to undergo a significant resurgence. What we do find on the main path leading to the temple is a Shinto-style *torii* (the standard symbolic gateway in Shinto), although when that was first erected cannot

immediately be ascertained. However that may be, since the Second World War times have changed again and to some extent it is now Shinto which has lost traction.

As to recent developments at the site of Shinnyoji, across a huge car park, and at the top of the hill just before one reaches the temple itself, there is a striking modern building in wood and glass, pointing to the stars. This acts as a community centre for the believers, and as a kind of observatory for looking up towards the heavens and the North Star. In appearance this is the kind of building which we might expect in a new religion, but here it is simply a case of a Nichiren-shū temple using contributions from the believers to keep up with the times. If anything, this addition increases the numinous quality of the slightly hidden older temple buildings which seem to be tucked away on the other side. There is no doubt however that Myōken's own hall continues to be the main focus of attraction.

Figure 5. The writer together with Niinori Shindō Shōnin 新實信導上人 *in front of Myōken's hall (the Kaiundō* 開運堂*) on Nose Myōkenzan, 15th March 2019.*

What the study of this Myōken mandala by Nichiken illustrates is that the Nichirenite mandala tradition is much more flexible than is sometimes implied by representatives of doctrinally severe sects, or in simplified descriptive narratives. The Nichiren-shū is admittedly the largest and most flexible of the Nichirenite denominations, and there is no dogmatic requirement as such for calligraphy-only versions of the mandala. On the other hand Nichiren's own model was extremely powerful and was reinforced by his important writing on the subject, the *Kanjinhonzonshō* 観心本尊省. The simplest common denominators of Nichirenite mandalas are the central title of the Lotus Sutra itself, the presence of various protecting divinities grouped around it, a reference to Nichiren, with or without other patriarchs, and the signature of the originator. In the original mandalas Nichiren was of course himself the signatory, immediately below the sutra title. In the

Myōken mandala Nichiren is honoured, but it is Myōken who seems to be providing central strength from below in support of the all-important title of the sutra.

Flexibility in the use of the Nichirenite mandala model also appears in other ways, and this will be illustrated, by way of conclusion, with two rare examples. First, we return to the very personal mandala which was mentioned earlier.

Fig 6. A personal calligraphic mandala in the Nichirenite tradition. Dimensions of central panel: height 31cm, width 17cm. Writer's collection.

From the outer right-hand vertical column in this mandala we learn that this is a votive script (*hōshosha* 奉書写), akin to a sutra-copying, dated on the eighth of the fourth month of Meiji 16 (i.e. 1883). The 8th April is the day on which the birthday of the Buddha is commemorated and is sometimes referred to in Japan as the "flower festival" (*hanamatsuri*) because cherry blossoms are likely to appear about then. On the back of the

scroll is a scribbled inscription giving the family name of the offerand as Fukui 福井. The personal name is highly cursive and unfortunately not legible, but it is likely that it is the work of a male householder. The devotee drew up the mandala as a protective amulet against fire, and it will no doubt have been hung up in a dwelling or business premises.

In structure, the mandala, as we may still call it, has approximately the standard form, and details of the key elements are akin to those explained in the main case treated above, although the positions and presentation diverge. In the centre is the title of the Lotus Sutra, immediately to its right are the protective great kings Daijikoku and Kōmoku Daiō, the two being run together, and to its left are Daibishamon and Zōchō Daiō, also run together. We also find Kishimojin on the right and Jūrasetsunyo on the left, in smaller script. Below the title appear Nichiren, referred to as a Great Bodhisattva, and Nittchō and Nichizō who are named as bodhisattvas. All these elements are grouped in the three central columns, which still leaves two vertical columns at the right and the left. At the outside right is the date on which the mandala was drawn up, and at the outside left is its dedication as an amulet (*o-mamori*) for the aversion of fires (*hi-yoke*).

This still leaves two lines of text in this mandala, being the second column from the right and left respectively, and these are quite distinctive. We find here the insertion of two sayings drawn from the Lotus Sutra. To the right we have: "Anyone who protects the name of the Dharma Flower will enjoy incalculable happiness" (an abbreviated sentence from the Dhāraṇī chapter of the sutra). The full sentence in the sutra is a little more complicated and reads "Even if you can only protect someone who preserves the name of the Dharma Flower [i.e. the title of the Lotus Sutra] your happiness will be immeasurable."[9] To the left we have: "This land of mine is tranquil and flourishes with gods and humans" (from the chapter on the "Immeasurable Life of the Tathagata").[10] In this chapter, considered one of the most important by Nichirenite Buddhists, it is taught that the length of life of the Buddha is not at all limited to the eighty years traditionally mentioned. His very appearance in the world, and apparent death or nirvana, is an expedient device or skilful means to shock people into taking the medicine they need. This is illustrated in the parable of the physician (in the same chapter) who went on a long journey so that his many sons would think he had died and out of remorse dutifully take their prescribed antidote to poison. Now, the Buddha proclaims, by contrast with those who think that the world is currently coming to an end in a great conflagration at the end of the kalpa, his Buddha-land is in reality already in a steady, peaceful state, and happily populated. With these quotations we see that although the mandala is drawn into complete alignment with the popular amulet function, seeking protection against fire, it is still a vehicle for the proclamation of the message of the Lotus Sutra.

[9] This phrase is found in the last paragraph of Chapter XXVI (Chinese count) entitled "Spells" (i.e. Dhāraṇī), but it simplifies the text somewhat. The text in the mandala runs in Japanese pronunciation: *jujihokkemyōsha fukufukaryō* 受持法花名者福不可量 (花=華). Incidentally, the occasional translation of *fuku* as "merit" rather than "happiness" may be regarded as doctrinal cleansing.

[10] This is found approximately in the middle of the verse section of Chaaser XVI (Chinese count). The text runs in Japanese pronunciation: *gashidoannon tenninjōjūman* 我此土安穏 天人常充満.

Finally, we turn to an example where the mandala function is beginning to fade away. On April 8th 2019 (Heisei 31, the last year of the era), again being the Buddha's birthday, the temple Honganmanzokuji 本願満足寺 in Teramachi, Kyoto, known as Honmanji for short, issued a pre-printed pilgrim's seal showing a simplified mandala-design with the blossoms of a weeping cherry tree drifting over it (see figure 7 below). Central here, as usual, is the title of the Lotus Sutra, and this makes a connection to the mandala tradition, but there are no "great kings" or protective divinities, and no reference to Nichiren or his successors in the tradition. The script proclaims that this temple safely preserves the image of its ancestral teacher (Nichiren)[11] and also that it proclaims the Dharma, a mission expressed in its "san" name: Kōsenrufu-san 広宣流布山. The phrase *kōsenrufu* is widely used in Nichirenite Buddhism to refer to the mission of spreading the Dharma.

Figure 7. Pre-printed calligraphy for the recording of a pilgrim's visit to Honmanjji, a Nichiren-shū temple in Kyoto. Original dimensions: height 15cm, width 10.5cm. Writer's collection.

What we see here is that although this item is reminiscent of the Nichirenite mandalas, the mandala function as such has now all but disappeared, and the pilgrim's need for commemoration of his or her visit has become dominant. Such small documents, in effect receipts for a contribution, were traditionally handwritten by a temple attendant on the spot.[12] In this case however, the calligraphic proof of visit is pre-printed. There is a

[11] *Tenhaisoshizō hōan no tera* 天拝祖師像奉安之寺.

[12] For a full account of this and related practices see Chapter 6 ("The Pilgrim's Transaction") of the present writer's *Japanese Buddhist Pilgrimage*, Sheffield (Equinox Publications) 2015. Cf. also M. Pye and K. Triplett: *Pilgerfahrt visuell: Hängerollen in der religiösen Alltagspraxis Japans. Eine Sonderausstellung der Religions-*

protective paper on the back, and when it is peeled off the all-important document can be stuck into the pilgrim's record book.

While this last ephemeral document is hardly a mandala any more, it still reminds the pilgrim who is going to visit various temples of the real mandalas made by Nichiren, and of those made in his style. It integrates significant pieces of information around the title of the Lotus Sutra, namely that the temple being visited here cares about its tradition, that it proclaims the Dharma, and that it offers to fully realise the deep vow or vows of the bodhisattvas.

In their different ways, therefore, these two additional examples also illustrate very clearly the endless associations in the overall continuum of Japanese religious activity. In sum, the distinctive message, in this case, that of the Lotus Sutra, can be embedded in the primal religious need for reassurance and protection, and carried along by it.

(April 2019)

Cite this paper as:
Pye, Michael: *A Nichirenite Scroll for Great Bodhisattva Myōken*. Philipps-Universität Marburg 2019.

kundlichen Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg 24.11.2009-26.6.2011, Marburg (diagonal-Verlag) 2009, in which further information about the general use of hanging scrolls by pilgrims and in religious contexts may be found. On May 21st 2019 the two scrolls shown in figures 4 and 6 above were donated to the Marburg Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung).